

## Thankful by prettyboypoter

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**Genre:** M/M

**Language:** English

**Characters:** Billy Hargrove, Dustin Henderson, Eleven | Jane Hopper, Jim "Chief" Hopper, Jonathan Byers, Joyce Byers, Lucas Sinclair, Maxine "Max" Mayfield, Mike Wheeler, Nancy Wheeler, Steve Harrington, Steve Harrington's Parents, Will Byers

**Relationships:** Billy Hargrove/Steve Harrington

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**Summary:**

Honestly? Steve's best Thanksgiving. Ever.

## Thankful

### Author's Note:

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The school is empty.

Painfully empty.

No babbling gossip, no slamming lockers, no loud laughter or tinny announcements. Just eerie silence.

Steve's shoes squeak occasionally as he makes his way to D hall, irritation pricking at his nerves. *I don't care if you're the only one there, Steven. You're going*, his dad said pointedly over breakfast, not bothering to look up from the newspaper. *Maybe you should look at this as an opportunity to bring up those sorry grades.*

He passes only three other students on the long trek back to health: two sophomore girls named Paulette and Stephanie, he thinks, and a freshman boy. Steve wonders if their parents made them come, too. A half day on the day before Thanksgiving? He could literally be doing anything else. Sleeping. Going to the movies. Pick-up game of basketball. Hell, he'd even let Dustin talk him into D&D at this point.

The sound of the tardy bell sends Steve flying around the corner; he already has eight tardies in third hour. He can't afford another or it'll mean a phone call home from Mr. Hollings and more endless bitching from his dad.

When he's a few feet from the classroom door, though, his feet skid to a stop. Billy Hargrove is sitting at a desk by the window, hand outstretched in a "stop" position, looking at Steve intently. He places his index finger against his lips. *Shhhhh*. He smiles behind his finger and motions Steve inside.

Steve tiptoes into the classroom.

Mr. Hollings is asleep at his desk, snoring softly, big black glasses slightly askew.

Amusement wells up and Steve can't hide his smile, and apparently Billy can't either with this shit-eating grin and tongue poking out from between his teeth.

Steve picks up the desk next to Billy and quietly moves it closer, shifting himself into Billy's orbit just like he's been doing these last months. It had started with whispers from Max at the Byers' kitchen table, Steve listening from across the room as he dried the dishes Joyce handed him. *Billy's been standing up for me even though he knows his dad will hit him. He told me not to tell Hopper because it'll just get worse.* It shifted into nods at the arcade parking lot as Max scurried out of the Camaro and Dustin, Mike, Will, and Lucas exited Steve's BMW. It happened over a shared cigarette when Joyce insisted that Billy come inside while Max played D&D. It was the time Steve caught Billy looking at him at Rhonda Jeffrey's backyard bonfire, in the smile free from bravado from across the crowd, hidden between shifting bodies and behind Billy's red Solo cup. It was in the apology at the Hawkins fireworks display - *I'm sorry, Harrington*, Billy had said before he passed Steve a joint, far from the crowd, surrounded by an army of trees standing sentinel. *King Steve to you, prick*, Steve said, smiling, smoke billowing from his lips. Billy laughed, small and private, the sound muffled by the trees and Steve felt a thrill that it was just for him, a goddamn gift for only the trees to hear.

Steve finds himself pulled in closer still, leaning over to Billy's desk. "Wanna get out of here?" he whispers. Maybe too close to Billy's neck. There's a pink flush there. Billy thinks for a moment, then plucks a piece of looseleaf from his binder, jots something down, and slides the paper to Steve.

### *Attendance*

1. *Billy Hargrove*
- 2.

Steve signs his name and places the paper on Mr. Hollings' desk. *Shhhh* he imitates Billy from earlier, finger on his lips, and walks backwards toward the door. Billy rolls his eyes at Steve and collects his things, sliding out quietly from his desk and falling in behind Steve as they slip silently from the classroom. Mr. Hollings snorts in his sleep behind them and Billy presses a fist to his mouth. Steve

can't hold his giggle and darts away down the hall, Billy close on his heels.

They end up sitting under the stairs, light slicing through the steps and highlighting the side of Billy's face. "Joyce and Hop used to come down here between classes to smoke," Steve says, lighting up his cigarette. Smoke billows up and floats in the gash of light.

Billy flicks open his Zippo. "Not surprised. Joyce was probably a hellraiser in school."

Steve nods. "Definitely was. Last weekend she told me that her and her boyfriend were the first students to ever smoke pot under the bleachers."

Billy barks a laugh. "Fuck. She's a legend, then. Paving the way for all of us future degenerates."

"Yeah," Steve says. "Sometimes," he halts, suddenly finds himself nervous. They've talked about small things, bickered endlessly about ridiculous nothings all day long, in class, in the halls, on the basketball court, but this is *real* and terrifying to say aloud. "Sometimes I like being at her house. Around her more than around my own family."

Billy toys with the button of his denim jacket, sunlight on his eyelashes as he looks down down and nods. "She invited me to dinner tomorrow."

"Yeah?" Steve smokes deeply, trying to stave off the goofy grin that threatens to overtake his whole face. "Me too."

"You gonna go?" Billy's eyes search Steve's face.

"My dad would never let me hear the end of it if I skipped dinner. But I told her I'd come by after. The kids want to start a campaign and I told Dustin and Lucas I'd pick them up on my way."

"Hey, I'll grab Sinclair," Billy says. "You've toted around those little shits enough. I'll help."

"Really?" Steve's eyes drop to the fine scar above Billy's eyebrow,

then to the two yellowing bruises under his ear, a small sickness twisting in his gut. “I mean. It’s not a problem. I don’t mind.”

“Don’t worry about it,” Billy says, slapping Steve’s shoulder. “Max’ll shit a brick.”

“Yeah, sure,” Steve says as he stubs out his cigarette against the wall. “See you tomorrow, then?”

“Yep. I’ve got dessert already.” Billy says, tapping his inside coat pocket. He’s got that grin again, the one that makes Steve feel like he’s climbing up the dunes at Lake Michigan, his feet slipping from under him as he scrambles to catch up.

~\*~

Steve suffers through dinner with his parents, the silence and sterility of his house climbing under his skin and making him itch with anticipation. “Thanks mom. Really good,” he says and after dropping his plate in the dishwasher. She’s not even paying attention, her eyes focused on something on TV. He checks his reflection again, snatches up his keys and shrugs on his jacket.

Dustin climbs into the car and pauses, looking at Steve warily as he places his backpack between his feet. “Uh, what’s up with you?”

“What, me? Nothing. Why. What? Does it seem like something’s up? What’s - am I okay? Do I have something, or?” Steve flips down his visor mirror, desperately checking for an out-of-place hair or stray booger or something equally as horrifying.

“You’re acting weird, Steve.”

Steve huffs, indignant. He flips his visor back up. “No. I’m not.”

“You *are*.”

“Not.”

“Are.”

“Well. This is clearly a productive conversation. I can see why you didn’t make the debate team. Now do you have any other observations to make, orrrr-?”

“Yes. You’re sweating a little bit. And you’re as jumpy, like you just saw a demodog.” Dustin turns in his seat and crosses his arms, muttering about Mind Flayers as Steve throws the car into drive.

Multiple cars are lined up outside of the Byers residence, but no Camaro. Steve opens the door to the bustle of a house in movement. Hopper is in the kitchen at the sink, handing over dishes for Jonathan to dry. Nancy has El on the couch, showing her how to make a paper fortune teller. Joyce is clearing the table as Mike and Will start placing their items on the table, already bickering over the new campaign. Dustin lugs his bag over and starts pulling out his book, character sheet, and die, and starts arguing immediately with them.

“Steve!” Joyce exclaims she hands over her towel to Jonathan, pulling Steve down into an embrace. “Saved you a big piece,” she says quietly, thrusting a dessert plate with a large slice of pumpkin pie topped with whip cream.

Warmth unfurls in Steve’s chest as he gives her a squeeze and takes the plate. “Thanks Mrs. Byers,” he manages.

He looks over Joyce’s head to see Lucas and Max slip into the kitchen, beelining to Hopper. Max speaks to him rapidly in hushed tones. Hopper places the dish he was washing back into the sink and leans down slightly, frowning. Lucas stands behind Max and looks back over his shoulder toward the front door.

All the chatter dies down. Billy’s standing in the doorway, still partly obscured by the darkness outside. It’s clear, though, that his left eye is swollen, a small trickle of blood running down his cheek.

“Jesus,” Joyce whispers and goes to the freezer, pulling out a bag of frozen corn. Steve walks out the door behind her.

Joyce sits Billy down in a chair on the porch, and Steve takes the chair right next to him. She leans down and places the bag gently over the side of Billy’s eye, pulling his hand up to hold it there. She

covers his hand with hers. “It’s okay, honey,” she says and plants a kiss to the top of his head. “We’ll take care of you. We won’t let anything happen to you.” Billy is breathing hard, his nostrils flaring. His throat works, starts bobbing, struggling for control. His eyes start to water.

The front door slams as Hopper marches toward his Blazer, Eleven trailing him. She stops in her tracks to regard Billy, her expression intent. Hopper turns and watches.

“He won’t hurt you anymore,” Eleven states.

Her words drop like stones, as if they were etched into the earth itself, sinking from the crust, past the mantle, to the very inner core.

“Come on Jane,” Hopper calls. Billy nods once at her, and she hops up into the truck. The engine roars to life, the truck reversing forcefully, then flies forward into the night.

Joyce watches them go, arms crossed. She turns to place a hand on Billy’s shoulder, squeezes, and retreats into the house, calling the kids away from the window.

Steve lights a cigarette and hands it over to Billy. “Ah, fuck. Thanks.” Billy readjusts the bag on his face to take a long, deep drag of the cigarette, tilting his head back to blow the smoke straight up. “Been a hell of a night.”

Billy turns his head to look dead on at Steve, and his expression nearly shatters Steve - a mix of hurt, of hope, of *want*.

Suddenly fear twists up inside Steve. *What if I fuck this all up? What if I can’t give him what he needs?* So he says the first thing that pops in his mind. “Do you need a place to crash tonight? You could stay at my house. My parents are,” he waves his hand, “oblivious to nearly everything except my grades.”

Billy smiles like Steve just lit the stars. “Yeah. Yeah, King Steve. Show me your castle.”

Joyce wraps up some pie for both of them and frets over Billy for a minute before declaring that Max is welcome to stay at her house, to

which the kids quickly declare a Party sleepover. A frenzy of phone calls home are made, and Joyce scribbles her phone number on a sheet of paper and places it in Billy's hand. "In case you need Max. Or anything." Steve in turn leaves his number with her.

It's not long before they're playing one on one at the hoop behind Steve's house. Billy strips off his hoodie. "Come on," Billy says, jostling Steve from behind as Steve dribbles the ball. He's trying not to let Billy roll over him. "Let's see some offence Harrington. Come on." Steve plants his feet and rolls around Billy's bulk, goes for the jump shot and sinks it. Billy claps loudly and hoots. "So you *do* listen to me. Nice feet, Harrington. I knew you had it in you."

Billy collects the ball and brings it over to Steve, stands close, and presses it into Steve's chest. His blue eyes are glittering. "Sometimes you say things worth listening to," Steve says as he cradles the ball.

"Yeah?" Billy says. He hasn't let go of the ball, just stands there, fingers close to Steve's along its curve. "Bout time you listened, pretty boy." Billy's index finger taps up, brushes under Steve's pinky.

Steve licks his lips. His eyes drop to Billy's mouth. "You, uhm." Steve's mind feels like the fried ham radio at the middle school. "You thirsty?" he finally manages.

"Yeah," Billy says and releases his grip on the ball. Steve tosses it aside and turns, not sure how to handle this feeling that reminds him of being covered in scorching hot summer sand at the lake.

He pulls a couple of beers from the fridge and hands one over. Billy's fingers brush over his. *Fuck*, Steve thinks, thrilled, panicked, and turned on. *Fuck fuck fuck fuck*.

Billy twists the cap off and drinks. His eye is starting to purple.

"Does that hurt?" Steve nods to his eye. Billy reaches up and touches it gingerly. Picks up Steve's hand and lets his fingers touch. Softly. Lets go of his wrist.

Steve's fingers linger over the swollen skin, his heart aching. His touch is gentle and Billy eyes him, lets him take the lead. Slowly

Steve touches lower, fingers touching new skin, Billy's cheek, beginnings of stubble rough under his fingers. He traces even lower to Billy's jaw, running over the angle of it. Steve leans in, can't stop himself, and presses his lips to Billy's.

Billy responds immediately, pressing his lips harder against Steve's, and Steve cups Billy's jaw, hyper aware of Billy's injury. Billy inhales sharply. "Been wanting that for so long," Billy says as he pulls back, changes the angle.

Steve listens to Billy's breath and kisses him accordingly, slides his lips over Billy's, teases his tongue into Billy's mouth. He feels stupid that they could've been doing this sooner; it's so good, Billy's little breaths puffing down his chin, the feeling of Billy's hands on his hips, slotting together perfectly in the middle of Steve's kitchen.

"Come on," Steve says when he pulls back. "Come with me."

"Pretty boy," Billy says and he kisses Steve's neck, "I'd follow you anywhere."

Steve leads Billy to his bedroom and shuts the door behind them. Billy sits on the edge of Steve's bed. "You don't have to - I mean, if you'd be more comfortable," he gestures to the couch along the wall of his large bedroom. "No pressure."

Steve sits next to Billy, placing little kisses along his jaw. "Or you can stay here."

"You can't get rid of me now, baby," Billy says before Steve leans in to reclaim his lips.

The night crawls in around them with cat's feet. With the lights shut off, the only light is that which streams from the moon through the window, throwing a rectangle of white on the floor. They lie down together, kissing lazily, emotion of the day dampening things from taking a sexual turn. As the crickets sound outside, Steve pulls Billy close. "I got you, sweetheart. I got you." Time moves slowly and sleep gradually overtakes them, the day after Thanksgiving dawning with new promise, golden and orange.